

Temple Island Chess
Version 2
By Karen Deal Robinson

Preliminary note: what is different about this version?

First of all, I don't look at this as the definitive version of the game. You can play either version, depending on your preference. There are only two differences between them.

1. In Version 2, the pieces are never allowed to be on the four golden squares of the Temple. In the Temple is an artifact called the Temple Sun. Like the real sun, it appears to move in a circle. I use a small crystal ball for this artifact. You could use a glass marble, or a crystal, or a coin, or a die, or anything you have on hand that strikes your imagination. It should be about the diameter of the chess pieces. In Version 1, the Temple squares may be entered just like any other squares. This makes a difference in the original set up, and the final configuration.

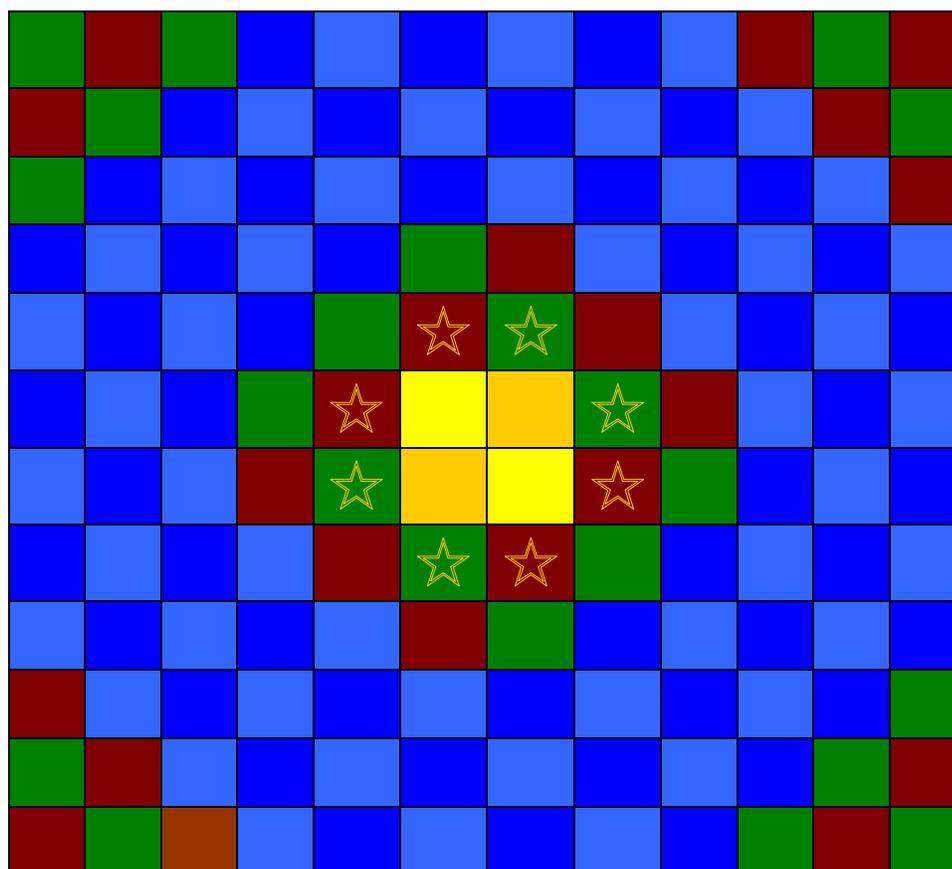
2. In Version 1, the direction the Shadows move is determined by the roll of a six-sided die. In Version 2, the direction is determined by the position of the Temple Sun as it moves through its day. I did this for two reasons.

The first is thematic: when I had been struggling to invent this game for a while, I brought my ideas to a facebook group called Abstract Nation, asking for ideas. One member suggested that the black pieces could be Shadows, moving in response to the white pieces and perhaps opposing them. Another member suggested that the direction of the Shadows could change with time, as the sun moved throughout the day. I liked that idea, but didn't know quite how to make happen. The original die roll didn't quite capture it.

The other is to make the game a real "abstract", as defined by the members of the group. That is, a game with no hidden information or randomness. It might have a theme of sorts (chess and go both represent war, sort of.) But the theme could be discarded and it would still work the same way.

Using a pre-set sequence of directions instead of a random die turns the game into a puzzle of sorts. But because there are so many ways of setting up the original game, including where in the day you start the Sun moving, no two games need ever be alike.

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Overview

Temple Island Chess is a solo game played with a chess set on a 12x12 chessboard marked with a central island, an ocean, and four outer islands. A Temple Sun piece is also used. This can be any pleasing and distinctive piece that fits on one of the four squares in the central temple. I used a small crystal ball.

The white pawns are the Pilgrims. The white non-pawn pieces are called the Guardians. The black pieces are the Shadows. The goal is to get all the Pilgrims from the outer islands to gates of the temple on the central island.

Each time the player moves a Pilgrim or a Guardian, a corresponding Shadow piece of a matching type moves according to the shadow cast by the Temple Sun. The Pilgrims must avoid touching the Shadows on their pilgrimage. A Pilgrim must be accompanied by a Guardian to travel across the ocean. No piece may enter the golden Temple squares, though long range pieces may pass over those squares.

Opening setup

The eight Pilgrims begin on the four outer islands, two per island. The eight Guardians are similarly distributed on the outer islands, two per island. Their exact placement is not fixed, but the Pilgrims are on the two squares orthogonally adjacent to the corners.

The sixteen Shadows begin on the central island. The eight Shadow pawns are in the starred Temple Gates, which are the final goal of the Pilgrims, and the other Shadow pieces are distributed elsewhere on the island. No pieces may be in the central four golden Temple squares. For aesthetic purposes, I like to place the black pieces in each quadrant so that they mirror the white pieces on the corner island of that quadrant. But for variety you can set them up other ways. (When a white piece moves, the player may choose any black piece of the same type to be its shadow for the duration of the move. The black piece does not have to be in the same quadrant.)

Place the Temple Sun piece in any of the four Temple squares, or on the line between two of the squares.

A sample set up is given in the diagram.

Goal

At the end of the game, the Pilgrims should be in the eight starred Temple Gates, the spaces orthogonally adjacent to the four central squares where the Temple is. All the Guardians should be on the Temple Island, and all the Shadow pieces should be in the ocean.

For aesthetic purposes, I like to have the Guardians standing behind the Pilgrims, as in the original diagram, but that is not necessary for a successful conclusion to the game. I like to finish by placing the Sun in the very center of the Temple.

Movement

The Guardians and their corresponding Shadows move as in ordinary chess. The Pilgrims and their Shadows move one space in any direction, like a chess king.

No piece is ever captured. When a white piece moves, a black piece automatically responds using the rules specified below. Neither the white nor the black piece can move any farther than the corresponding piece can move.

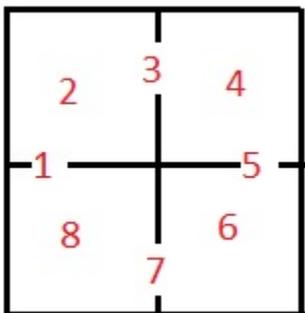
Touching

Two pieces are considered to be touching if they are on adjacent squares, either orthogonally or diagonally. A Pilgrim may not touch any Shadow at any time. While a Pilgrim is on an ocean square it must be touching a Guardian at all times. On any of the islands, Pilgrims can move independently of the Guardians but still may not touch Shadows.

Temple Sun movement

Shadow pieces are moved in response to the white piece moved, and the direction depends on the Temple Sun.

At the beginning of each turn, the Temple Sun moves half a space clockwise through the four squares of the temple. For example, if the Sun begins on the line between the left two squares, it will progress next to the upper left square. On the third turn it moves line between the upper two squares. On the fourth turn it moves to the upper right square, and so on. It takes eight turns to complete one day.



Shadow movement

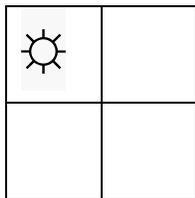
The Sun casts shadows in the direction opposite to where it's located. For example, if it is in position 1 in the above diagram, it casts a shadow in the direction of position 5. If it's in position 2, it casts a shadow in the direction of position 6. (If this is too confusing, just let the position of the Sun be the direction of the shadow. I used the opposite direction for the sake of the theme, but the game play is equivalent if you use the original position as the direction.)

When a Pilgrim or Guardian moves to an empty square, the player selects a corresponding Shadow piece to move. The Shadow piece is of the same type as the white piece (Pilgrim or Guardian.) It moves the same number of spaces as the white piece, but the direction is determined by the Temple Sun.

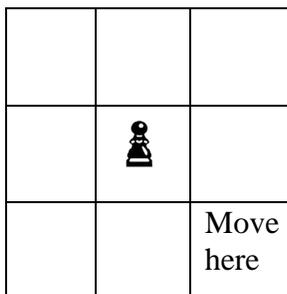
The player may select any black piece of the corresponding type to be the Shadow of the white piece. For example, if a white Rook moves, the player may select either of the black Rooks to move. Both the Guardian Rook and its Shadow must have a clear path to move, making sure the Shadow does not touch any Pilgrim and that a Pilgrim on the ocean is touching a Guardian at all times.

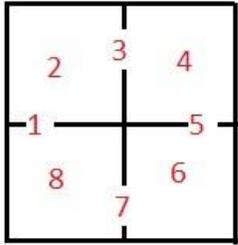
The chosen Shadow piece will move as nearly as possible in the direction of the Sun shadow. For example, if the Sun casts a shadow into the lower right corner, the Shadow piece will move diagonally downward and to the right. With the exception of the Knights, only Shadow pieces whose normal movement is in that direction may move. (Remember that in this game, Pawns move like chess Kings.) So Pawns, Kings, and Queens could move in any of the eight directions. The following is an example.

Temple Sun position



Movement of King or Pawn (In this example the Bishop or Queen could also move to the same square, or further in that direction.)



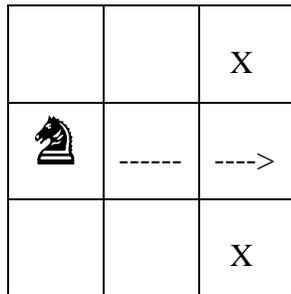


But a Rook could only move when the shadow of the Sun is pointing in an orthogonal direction (1,3,5 or in the above diagram), and a Bishop could only move when the shadow of the Sun is pointing in a diagonal direction (2,4,6, or 8 in the Sun diagram.)

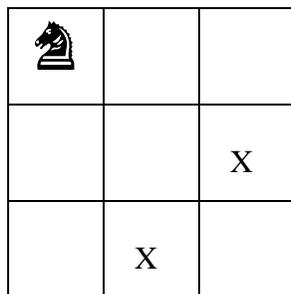
If the Sun were in position 1, for example, the Rook would move to the right.

The Knight is a little trickier to describe. Look at the direction of the Sun's shadow, and imagine a line going in that direction. The Knight could move to either of the two squares adjacent to that line.

If the Sun were in position 1, the Knight could move to either square marked X:



If the Sun were in position 2, the Knight could move to either square marked X:



Penalties

I have found in playing this game that it is easy to inadvertently break the rules about leaving a Pilgrim unsupported on the ocean, or touched by a Shadow. If you notice that you have done this before making the next move, you may go back and redo the move. If, on the other hand, you notice it too late to fix it, the Pilgrim is sent out of the world, off the board. To bring it back into the world, a Guardian piece must go to one of the outer islands to a square touching an empty corner square. It must follow the rules of the game in traveling, including moving the Shadow piece. At that point the exiled Pilgrim may be returned to the corner square.

Comments

Though I haven't tested all possibilities, I believe that with patience and persistence this game can always be brought to a successful conclusion. After many years playing two-player games right-hand-vs.-left-hand, I'm not that interested in winning or losing, but rather in the fun of the playing. I don't see this as a game to sit down and play all at once, but one to leave set up on the table and play for a while, and then come back later and play some more. Like all pilgrimages, it takes time.

If you're the sort of player who finds it more exciting to play with the possibility of losing, here are some options:

1. If you make a mistake and leave a pawn unsupported or touching a Shadow, it is removed from the game entirely. If a certain number of pawns are lost in this way, you lose the game.

2. If you are left with a turn that gives you no legal moves, which seems very unlikely, you lose the game. For myself, I would just move the Sun and try again.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the suggestions of Chaz Campos and Sean Fenemore on the Abstract Nation Facebook page. I had posted some preliminary ideas and asked for help. Chaz suggested having the black pieces be the shadows of the corresponding white pieces. They would move when the white pieces moved and block the white pieces from reaching their goal. Sean added that there could be a sun effect that would change the directions of the shadows over time.

March 15, 2021